

AGENDA ITEM IV B

REQUEST FOR CONTINUED APPROVAL OF RESEARCH UNIT

LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE ON
BLINDNESS**

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At its meeting on September 27, 2001, the Board of Regents granted conditional approval of the Professional Development and Research Institute on Blindness for one year, stipulating that the University submit a proposal for full approval the following year. The University submitted such a proposal, and at its October 2002 meeting, the Board granted it three years of full approval. In its motion, the Board stipulated that the University file three annual progress reports on the Institute's operations and its success in generating external support other than that provided by the Louisiana Center for the Blind (LCB), its main collaborator.

STAFF ANALYSIS

1. Institute Operations in 2004-05

- a. The Institute helps to administer two graduate programs, the M.A. in Educational Psychology (with concentration in Orientation & Mobility), and a M.Ed. with certification in Teaching Blind Students (TBS). Since 2001, there have been 34 total graduates from these programs. Of these, 25 were successful in achieving National Orientation and Mobility Certification through the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. Of these 25, twenty-three are currently employed; six (6) are employed in Louisiana.

In the two years the M.Ed. with certification in TBS has existed, eight (8) graduates were eligible for state certification to work with visually-impaired children in public schools. This fall, all eight graduates are employed full-time in their chosen professions.

The Institute has been working to invigorate student recruitment to the program.

- b. The Institute sponsored six statewide workshops and conferences for professionals who work with the visually-impaired.
- c. The Institute has been involved in the redesign of graduate and undergraduate Special Education programs, M.A.T. programs, and add-on certification programs in Special Education. The Institute has also been involved in the development of an add-on certification for teaching blind students in an Early Intervention graduate degree which is also in development.

- d. The Institute participated in six professional conferences and training workshops.
- e. The Institute has established a “Critical Concerns in Blindness” book series. Three books have been published; another five are in press or under development.
- f. Institute faculty completed two research projects, one qualitative, one quantitative.

2. External Funding Other than LCB in 2004-05

The Louisiana Center for the Blind has continued to award grants to the Institute to promote its activities: in 2004-05, it awarded the Institute another five-year grant of \$500,000, or \$100,000 per year.

- a. In 2003, the Institute was also awarded a \$500,000 (five-year, \$100K/year) grant to support the training of O&M students from the USDOE’s Rehabilitation Services Administration. There were also two other smaller grants awarded that same year, but it appears both have expired.
- b. Recently, the Institute was not awarded a grant for \$789,924 from the USDOE’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

STAFF SUMMARY

The Institute continues to provide valuable service and research to the students and citizens of Louisiana. State financial support for Institute operations is very strong and will probably continue in the future. The staff is reminded however that part of the purpose of the Institute designation is to enable an entity to project its stature to the national level by securing sources of funding external to Louisiana. The Institute on Blindness has had some measure of success in the past -- success which continues to benefit the Institute -- but the staff is concerned that the Institute’s latest grant proposal to the USDOE was not funded. This raises some question regarding long-term research competitiveness.

Sufficient funding does exist for Institute operations, so the staff recommends that the Institute be granted an additional three years of full approval (i.e., until October 1, 2008). In the interim, it should file another progress report about the extent of its operations and funding.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The staff recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee receive the 2004-05 Progress Report from Louisiana Tech University Relative to Implementation of the Professional Development and Research Institute on Blindness. The staff also recommends that the Committee grant three additional years of full approval to the Institute, with the stipulation that the University submit a progress report updating the full extent of Institute operations and external funding to the Commissioner of Higher Education by October 1, 2007.